

181 Despite the grim struggle for survival, the average villager tended to be cheerful, self-respecting, and possessed of a robust sense of humor. He went through life with a continuous concern for his own "face" or prestige among his fellows and with the strong determination and unceasing faith that, despite all, the fortunes of his family would steadily improve.

B. The Pattern of Urban Life

369 Urban life, although it meant a different pattern of work, was closely akin to life in the villages. Town and city dwellers -- perhaps 20 per cent of China's population -- kept their ties with their native villages, returned there whenever possible and many saw commercial activity in the town only as a means to the acquisition of sufficient wealth to buy farming land and return to the village.¹² The town population, then, was mostly made up of artisans and peasants, plus a small number of landlords, retired officials, county functionaries, and established merchant families.

632 The county seats (hsien capitals) were the
369 centers for tax collection and administration of

12. Cressey, Land of the 500 Million, pp. 18-19. The 1953 Communist census credits cities and towns (undefined) with 13.26 per cent of the Mainland population.

369 the surrounding farm-villages and also served
 632 as market towns where the peasant might sell
 ● his crop and purchase the manufactured goods
 he could not produce.

511 Town life for the average artisan was as
 meager as for his relatives in the village.
 Long hours, hard work, low pay, few holidays
 wer the lot of most, and living conditions were
 generally poorer and more crowded than those
 in the villages. Proprietors of many shops
 required their employees to live on the premises,
 so that they seldom visited their families. The
 diet of the town dweller was as poor as that
 of the poor farmer -- mostly cereals,
 vegetables, and some condiments, and meat
 527 and fruit on holidays only. Brief holidays were
 allowed at the New Year, the Ch'ing-ming
 Festival, the mid-Autumn festival, and the
 Dragon Boat festival. On these occasions,
 townspeople usually tried to return to their
 villages; if this was impossible they enjoyed
 such delicacies as they could afford and
 strolled the streets, perhaps visiting friends
 and attending seasonal fairs and theaters.

369 Life in the towns was, then, closely
 361 linked with village life. But in the cities and
 provincial capitals, such as Kunming,

Chungking, Chengtu, life in some
 respects has been greatly altered by the
 modernization that spread slowly from the

III. CHANGING PATTERNS OF LIVING

668 In the towns and cities, as in the countryside, the greatest changes in living patterns have been brought about by the network of new associations by which the regime envelops and controls the individual. Workers in various traditional crafts, merchants, industrial workers, all are organized by the Party, and it is within these groups, under the guidance of cadres, that the urban working population is most strenuously indoctrinated. In long and frequent meetings, the city dweller is under intense pressure to manifest "correct attitudes," to show himself free of all "feudal" and "bourgeois" taint, and to demonstrate his complete commitment to Communist goals. Through these and other channels he is under continual pressure to step up his efficiency and productivity. The meetings take such a toll of his energy at the end of the working day that they are openly referred to as "fatigue meetings."³⁰

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668 City and town dwellers are also organized into street and ward units, which serve further to mold urban life into the new pattern.³¹ The

30. Rostow, op. cit., p. 160.

31. Cf., "Regulations of Urban Organizations," Current Background, 310, Jan. 17, 1955.

• 632 townsman, more than the peasant, is open to
668 an "around the clock" propaganda barrage.
From the first call to early morning calisthenics,
the radio blares in every street until late at
night. There is pressure to join sports groups,
study groups -- all with their ideological
purposes. The major Communist holidays are
celebrated in the cities with great parades and
with endless speeches. Privacy and the chance
to be at ease with family or friends are rare.

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527 The New Year's holiday has some of its
old gaiety, although subject to the same
restrictions imposed on the peasant. The
cities receive special shipments of seasonal
delicacies, they appear to do at the mid-autumn
and Dragon Boat festivals, and trips back to
the family village may be possible for a
minority of the urban population.³² New Year's
activities in 1955 suggest the way in which

32. Enlightenment Daily, Jan. 23, 1955, p.
2. In preparation for the New Year exodus from
the cities in 1955, the Ministry of Railways
estimated that "over three and half million
more people will travel than on normal days,
mostly to join in united family celebrations
of the holiday." NCNA dispatch, Jan. 19,
1955; SCMP, 972, Jan. 20, 1955, p. 21.

CHAPTER II

THE COMMUNITY

The Locality

West Town is within a day's journey on foot or horseback from Hsiakuan, the nearest point on the Burma Road. It has Er Hai (a lake) to one side and Ta'ang Shan, a mountain about 14,000 feet above sea level, to the other side. The general level of the ground in this part is about 6,700 feet above sea level. The chief occupation of the area is agriculture, rice being the staple crop. But trading in various forms is common both as a subsidiary and as the chief occupation. The trading includes both local exchanges in various markets and large-scale commercial adventures into the outer world. West Town is built on this peculiar form of commercialism. (3)

The locality is a small village or town, being under the jurisdiction of the district government of Tali. It has a population of about 1,000 households and about 8,000 people. Shops are not numerous, mostly groceries, cloth stores and a few food shops. There are a few native dispensaries and one apparently modern dispensary. The chief markets of exchange are the periodic fairs which take place both in and near the town. 621

The town is not walled. Some years ago four gates were erected which shut the town from the outlying villages at the ends of the two main thoroughfares of the town, which cross each other. At night the streets are patrolled by a town-hired watchman. But the population of the town is not only confined to within these gates. Near the town are at least nine more or less clearly marked out-clusters of houses, each of which has a name as a village. Within the four gates, each street, or each section of a street, is also called a village. 621 361

People and Culture

The town with its nine near-by and several more distant villages is under the authority of a Chen-Chang (head of a sub-district) appointed by and under the direction of the governor of the district (Hsien Chang) of Tali. A small police force, supported by the town, maintains law and order. Generally speaking, the town and its satellite villages is one of the Min Chia colonies in Yunnan. But all inhabitants in the town and in all the nine near-by villages except one insists on their Chinese origin, and will be seriously offended if suggestions to the contrary are made to them. This controversial point is not the concern of this paper. It suffices here to observe that all except the inhabitants in that one village who profess to be Min Chias bind their women's feet and wear Chinese dress. But all speak Min Chia as their mother-tongue. Most men and a few women, however, speak Chinese (with a strong local accent) as well. Here the social differences between men and women is carried to its extreme. Virginity of unmarried women and chastity of married women are heavily guarded and valued. Women work while men enjoy light conversation over a cup of tea or beside a tray with an opium-smoking pipe. 632 181

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(3) For a general description of the Tali area (the geographical conditions of Tali and its environs) the reader may look up C.P. Fitzgerald, The Tower of Five Glories, London, 1941. As a serious scientific effort the book is a hotchpotch of hearsay and observation which disgraces rather than deserves the name of ethnology. This will be dealt with elsewhere in extension.